

The Vines in 2014:
(l-r) Tim John, Craig
Nicholls, Lachlan West

The Vines creep back

With plenty of new songs but none of his former bandmates on board, Craig Nicholls refloats The Vines with double album 'Wicked Nature'

In 2002, The Vines appeared on the cover of *NME* on three separate occasions. "Celebrity fans, awesome gigs and a brilliant album – no wonder everyone wants to shag Craig Nicholls," read the text on one. Once touted as Australia's saviours of rock'n'roll, the band have, in recent years, been relatively quiet – which is just how frontman Nicholls likes it. "I really have no connection to anything," he says down the line from his Sydney home. "I can't drive a car, I don't have a mobile phone, I can't work computers or the internet or anything. I don't understand it, so I don't fit in. It seems alien to me but it's this big part of most people's everyday lives."

Nicholls' technological isolation inspires the band's newly announced sixth album, the 22-track double LP 'Wicked Nature', due in September, and its lead single 'Metal Zone' (pictured above), which is out now. Recorded last year, the album flips the premise of 2011's

electronica-tinged 'Future Primitive' on its head, documenting Nicholls' views on 21st century technology: in his own words, "me not liking it and me screaming about it".

Returning with a double album after all but fading into obscurity may sound like overblown self-indulgence, but Nicholls reckons it's due

to him hitting a purple patch. "We had a lot of songs," he says. "Just a few months after that I had more songs, so it felt really good having so many. We thought it would just be easier to put them all out together instead of having to wait."

When Nicholls says 'we', it's a brand-new Vines line-up he's talking about. Online rumours suggest long-serving bandmates Ryan Griffiths (guitar), Brad Heald (bass) and Hamish Rosser (drums) were sacked, but the singer's explanation is less dramatic. "Everyone was going in different directions," he says. "They're good guys but it wasn't working out."

Replacement bassist Tim John and drummer Lachlan West were found via an auditioning process. Nicholls now finds himself fronting a new band, poised to release The Vines' first independent album (on an imprint named Wicked Nature, like the album) and with his first co-production credit.

His aim was "to make a rock'n'roll album that's pretty up and pretty heavy". 'Out The Loop', the first track from the album to have been revealed online, ticks all the boxes – and picks up one of the recurring themes of Nicholls' songwriting over the years. "The words are about not really fitting in, being an outsider," he explains. "Do I still feel like that? Yeah, it never really changes. But it works good for writing songs!" ■ RHIAN DALY



"THEY WERE OUR FAVOURITE"

Arctic Monkeys' Alex Turner on The Vines

"The Vines, they were the big one for us, I suppose. We all went to see them together on their UK tour in 2002 – very fond memories. They were what made you see that being in a band was a good idea. We were all about The Vines. They were, I think, collectively our favourite band at the time."



THE MINI INTERVIEW



Ice T

You revisit your song '99 Problems' on the new Body Count album, 'Manslaughter'. Are you worried people will think you're covering Jay Z?

"When we were recording, the band would play the licks to Jay Z's '99 Problems' and I'd sing the real lyrics over the top. Some people would say, 'That's Jay-Z's song', and I'd be like, 'Dumb fuck, that's my shit.' I wrote it 11 years before him! It's a booby trap we put on the album."

The song 'Wanna Be A Gangsta' is critical of kids who want to be like you...

"Yeah, suburban kids listening to rap and acting tough behind their keyboards. If they touch down on those streets, they're gonna get their ass sewn up."

Body Count is your rock project. What hip-hop stuff have you got going on at the moment?

"None. Hip-hop's gone in a different direction – it's club music, no content, just 'I got money, cars, girls'. Underground hip-hop's still prolific, but the stuff on the radio sucks."

So you're all metal now?

"Ice T has always been about hardcore, aggressive music. With Body Count, it's art, it's over the top, it's hypersexual. I roll with the people who get it. The people who don't, I throw them a Barry Manilow album." ■ GARY RYAN